

Re: HB0425 – Public Safety, Untraceable Firearms

As the founder and president of the Jesse Klump Memorial Fund, whose primary mission is suicide prevention (and as the mother of a young man who took his own life with a firearm) I'm writing to ask you to support HB0425 progress through the legislature and assure its passage in 2022.

Why would suicide prevention nonprofit be concerned about the availability of traceable vs. untraceable firearms? *First, let me assure you that this does mean that I or my organization is advocating for seizure of weapons from responsible owners. We are not.*

Maryland has indisputably been a leader in suicide prevention, with state rates typically below national rates. Untraceable, or “ghost” guns, however, present barriers to efforts to prevent suicide:

- The *Journal of the British Medical Association* reports that the ability to identify firearm types and characteristics provides data that is very useful in development of suicide prevention programs and policies.
- Information on guns used most frequently in suicide is a valuable tool for evaluating intervention programs. Data from a Wisconsin buyback program, for example, allowed crisis response interventionists to evaluate risk by knowing about the gun involved and its likelihood of being a means of suicide.
- Knowledge of the time duration between the initial purchase of a gun and its use in a suicide attempt is especially valuable. Once again from a Wisconsin study, data showed a sharp increase in the risk of a suicide with a gun within one week of its purchase. Information on whether the victim was the first purchaser and the time interval between purchase of the firearm and the suicide may be important in effective efforts to restrict the purchase of guns by persons with a history of mental illness. A history of mental illness is a known risk factor for suicide.
- The link between mental health issues and suicidality is incontrovertible. Under federal law, a person who has been treated in a mental health facility or who has been declared mentally ill by a court can be listed on a database and barred from purchasing a firearm. Background checks for mental issues vary state by state, but the ability to purchase an untraceable gun for the purpose of taking one's own life avoids all background checks and gun purchase barriers.
- In Maryland since 2003, it has been unlawful for a firearms dealer to sell a gun that is not equipped with a locking mechanism. This is good, but ghost guns are not typically sold by licensed dealers. The very purpose of a ghost gun is to avoid detection and responsibility. Ghost guns are becoming the weapon of choice for criminals, gun traffickers and those who cannot legally purchase a gun.

Our focus as an organization is on suicide prevention, but we cannot ask that you consider only suicide when evaluating this bill. In Baltimore in 2021, 700 ghost guns were seized after having been implicated in criminal activities. Recently a 17-year old used a ghost gun to murder a student in Montgomery County. “Kids can buy them, kids can build them, kids can use them,” said Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy. Kids – anyone for that matter – who cannot legally buy a gun can acquire a ghost gun and use it on themselves

Thank you for what we know will be your wise decision regarding HB 0425.

Kim A. Klump, President  
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